

VZCZCXRO8432
PP RUEHPB
DE RUEHSV #0224/01 1531656
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 011656Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0560
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0001
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2037
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0014
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0125
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0109
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1550
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0026
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0127
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0651
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 1061
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0332
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000224

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI'S BAINIMARAMA -- WITHOUT PRETENSIONS. ALSO
NOTES ABOUT DONORS

REF: SUVA 204

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

11. (C) During a meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) in Vanuatu last week, and in a media interview on the side, interim PM Bainimarama made clear publicly that he sees himself as the Atatürk of Fiji, the military man who has the vision to right the nation's wrongs and build a bright future. Bainimarama expressed frustration at critics, including the United States, who fail to accept his motives as pure. He said elections will only take place once a People's Charter is in place to mandate future governments' behavior. If any future government goes against the Charter, Bainimarama will remove that government. He advocated a free media, so long as it is un-biased and "pro-Fiji." In other news, a source in MFA sketched interim government (IG) efforts to cultivate new donors to replace those, like Australia, who are now unfriendly. Aside from the expected targets like China and India, the source said efforts are under way to create bilateral agreements with Turkey, Italy, and Venezuela. The same source discussed an IG impression that, within the EU, France wants to be accommodating, in contrast to the UK. End summary.

Melanesian Spearhead Group and Fiji

12. (U) Leaders of the MSG (PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji), including interim PM Bainimarama, met in Port Vila, Vanuatu, last week. According to Fiji media reports, Bainimarama received a rather understanding response when he laid out his explanations for the 2006 coup and his vision for Fiji's future. Reportedly, interim Foreign Minister Nailatikau had told the ministerial portion of the conclave that elections in March 2009 remain set. Bainimarama was more candid, describing the IG's strongly held view that elections will only make sense when a People's Charter is in place to mandate the right course for future Fiji governments. Bainimarama reportedly complained to MSG leaders about Australia, New Zealand, and other donor critics, saying, "We need help, not closed doors."

Military has the vision; accept it

13. (U) In an interview with a journalist from the Fiji Times

on the margins of the Vanuatu meetings, Bainimarama made his intentions even more clear. He sees the People's Charter as setting the course for non-corrupt, non-race-based, democratic governance. Parties that want to participate in elections will have to accept the Charter. If deposed PM Qarase and his SDL party want to participate, "they have to come on my terms." If any future elected government attempts to go against Charter principles, Bainimarama said he "will remove" that government. If corrupt elements utilize the current constitution to attempt to frustrate the interim government's vision -- as some high chiefs are now attempting with regard to a revised Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) that is to bless the choice of a new, IG-approved, Vice President -- the military will do whatever is necessary, including abrogate the constitution. That would be "no big deal." Bainimarama suggested most people in Fiji are all in favor of his efforts, even though people like Qarase and some in the international community remain opposed.

Reluctant knight in shining armor

14. (U) In the newspaper interview, Bainimarama said he removed the Qarase government with great reluctance, but his motives were pure: to bring about a far better Fiji than what had come before. Thus, the 2006 coup was completely different from Fiji's earlier coups where selfishness was the motive. He suggested an apt comparison is to the Turkish military. He said, "I've been standing up to everyone, the Australians, the Kiwis, the Americans, the British, the European Union...The people who are attacking us, they're

SUVA 00000224 002 OF 002

attacking us because of talks with the ousted people." If it had been the Methodist Church or the GCC that had carried out the coup, it "would have been endorsed by countries like the United States of America." But "unfortunately" it was the military. "Usually when the military does this, it is seen as a grab for power." But this time, Bainimarama averred, the motive was genuine reform.

Responsible "pro-Fiji" media needed

15. (U) In the interview, Bainimarama said the media need to be regulated to ensure they are without "bias" and are "pro-Fiji." He added, "We don't want to gag the media, we don't want to stop media freedom...but we want someone from outside to have a look...instead of the publishers and editors." He complained, "Why is the media so much against the interim Government when we've done nothing but plan good for this country?"

Looking abroad: who is in, who is out

16. (C) According to a source within Fiji MFA, the IG is actively pursuing bilateral assistance agreements with Turkey, Italy, and Venezuela. (Note: The IG has also obviously been cultivating China, Korea, India, and Malaysia, part of a "look North" policy to find new friends since the coup.) The source said the IG is attempting in particular to find alternatives to Australian assistance, even for sectors such as the judiciary and education where the Aussies have continued post-coup aid.

Sensing opportunities in the EU?

17. (C) The MFA source said the IG perceives a split within the EU delegation in Suva (the UK, France, and the EU office). In IG meetings with the troika, when the UK makes an anti-IG comment, the French ambassador has repeatedly said in front of all: "That is not our position," implying Fiji's government is Fiji's business. The MFA source said France is looking at the possibility of opening up some bilateral development-assistance links with the IG. MFA sees the Brussels position as somewhere between the UK and France: willing to work with the IG, but not so willing as the French. (Note: the MFA's perception of French views may be

somewhat out of date. Certainly the French ambassador frequently expressed the view in the past that Fiji's coup was nowhere near as shattering as some African coups have been. However, we hear all three troika members have lately been on the same page in meetings, quite critical of the IG.) A high-level EU delegation is due to visit Suva June 18-20 to evaluate the IG's efforts to date to fulfill Cotonou Agreement pledges for a return to democracy.

Comment

18. (C) Bainimarama's messages from Vanuatu are fascinating, if illogical. We expect he does believe the 2006 coup is different from all past coups here. While some of his motives and methods were considerably less pure than he now describes, he most likely does think he can mandate a positive transformation of Fiji society. And once transformed, there surely will be no need for future coups. He seems genuinely to be mystified why critics remain critics. Why won't they just trust him? The most amazing single sentence from the media interview may be the following: "We want to have elections but we have to have elections on my terms so that we can cut out this coup mentality." Every day remains an interesting day in Fiji.
DINGER